

Blueberry - Lichen Barren

State Rank S2

Community Description

These barrens are wide, flat to hummocky expanses of dwarf shrub vegetation punctuated by sparse pine or spruce trees. Lowbush and/or velvet-leaf blueberry is the predominant shrub, forming a fairly even carpet. Herbs are sparse. In patches among the shrubs, reindeer lichens may form extensive carpets. The characteristic expression of this community is as an opening within woodland barrens such as Pitch Pine - Scrub Oak Barrens or Spruce - Heath Barrens; smaller openings (e.g., less than an acre) would be considered inclusions, but larger ones should be segregated as this non-wooded type.

Soil and Site Characteristics

Coarse textured glacial outwash deposits form a flat to undulating substrate that can encompass a wide moisture gradient. Xeric conditions on hummocks or raised areas can grade into bog-like vegetation in depressions. Soils are highly acidic and nutrient poor. Sites are typically found in areas where fire has been



Gray Birch Leaves

frequent. Lichen carpets may be characteristic after particularly hot fires.

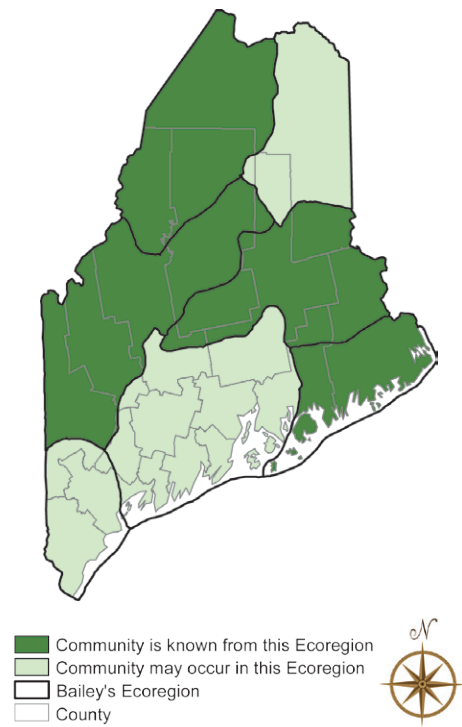
Diagnostics

Lowbush blueberry is dominant, lichens are abundant, and conifers and other trees are sparse.

Similar Types

Little Bluestem - Blueberry Sandplain Grasslands are more common southward, lack the abundant lichens, and feature little bluestem grass as a local dominant. Pine and spruce barrens (Pitch Pine - Scrub Oak Barrens, Pitch Pine - Heath Barrens, Spruce - Heath Barrens) are closely related but have more tree cover.

Location Map



Burned Blueberry Barren

Conservation, Wildlife, and Management Considerations

Many former natural occurrences of this type have been converted to actively managed blueberry barrens in Downeast Maine. While these managed barrens maintain some superficial resemblance to natural barrens, pesticide use may have changed their species composition. Both of the documented occurrences of this type are on state-owned or private conservation land.

Managed blueberry barrens provide some of the best habitat in the northeast for the rare upland sandpiper and other ground-nesting species like the rare short-eared owl. The whimbrel, a non-breeding migrant shorebird, uses near-coastal barrens for foraging. The graceful clearwing, a butterfly that feeds on blueberries in its larval phase, is formerly known from Maine and may have inhabited examples of this community within pitch pine barrens.

Distribution

Natural occurrences are known only from Downeast and extreme northwestern Maine; poorly documented.

Landscape Pattern: Small Patch

Characteristic Plants

These plants are frequently found in this community type. Those with an asterisk are often diagnostic of this community.

Sapling/shrub

- Gray birch
- Red pine
- White pine

Dwarf Shrub

- Black chokeberry
- Lowbush blueberry*
- Meadowsweet
- Sheep laurel
- Sweetfern

Herb

- Bracken fern
- Wintergreen

Bryoid

- Awned hair-cap moss
- Juniper hair-cap moss
- Red-stemmed moss
- Reindeer lichen*

Associated Rare Plants

- Canada mountain-ricegrass

Associated Rare Animals

- Short-eared owl
- Upland sandpiper
- Whimbrel

Examples on Conservation Lands You Can Visit

- Niatous Public Lands
– Hancock Co.
- St. John River Preserve
– Aroostook Co.